

Emergency preparedness tips

The possibility of flooding, power outages, earthquakes and even tsunamis poses a concern to everyone in Island County and, if to a lesser extent, those in Snohomish and Skagit counties as well. While it's impossible to prevent or in many cases even anticipate such events, planning can mean the difference between relief and tragedy, and can minimize hardship. Here are some basic tips:

Stock a basic emergency kit

Experts warn that you should be prepared to be on your own for a minimum of three days after a disaster. Assemble a kit containing at least the following items:

- One gallon of water per person per day. This means at least three gallons of water per person.
- Sufficient non-perishable food for three days. Ideally, these foods will be lightweight and high in energy. If you pack canned foods, remember also to pack a can opener.
- Prescription and non-prescription medications. Include a spare set of glasses, if you wear them.
- Battery-powered portable radio. This may be your only source of information during a disaster.
- First aid kit. Small camping kits work well. Remember to get enough supplies for the number of people who may be using them.
- Personal hygiene items.
- Clothing and bedding. A spare pair of socks and a space saver blanket would be a minimum.
- Special items such as baby needs or contact lens supplies, etc.
- Personal comfort items such as books, games, personal electronics, etc.

Be prepared for a loss of power

- Have a disaster plan and assemble a disaster supplies kit (include several flashlights, battery powered radio, extra batteries and a wind-up clock).
 - Fill vehicles with gas in case gas stations lose their power, too.
 - Always keep a small amount of extra cash available. ATM machines might not operate or might become quickly exhausted.
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- Register life-sustaining equipment with your utility.
 - Consider buying a small generator to run electrically powered life-sustaining equipment.
 - When installing a generator, follow the manufacturer's instructions and have it inspected by the utility company and state electrical inspector. Always install a generator outdoors, never inside a house where the fumes can cause carbon monoxide poisoning.
 - Post the phone number of the “New Construction, Repairs and Power Outage” listing of your local utility.
 - Learn how to open your electric garage door using the manual override.
 - Make sure you have an alternate heat source and fuel supply.
 - Have a corded telephone available. Cordless phones do not work when the power is out.
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What to do if you lose power

- Report the outage to your local utility.
 - If you are the only residence without power, check your fuse box or circuit breaker panel. Turn off large appliances before replacing fuses or resetting circuits.
 - If power is out in the neighborhood, disconnect all electrical heaters and appliances to reduce the initial demand and protect motors from possible low voltage damage.
 - Connect lights and appliances directly to a generator, not to an existing electrical system.
 - If you leave home, turn off or unplug heat producing appliances. Unplug computers and other voltage sensitive equipment to protect them from power surges.
 - Conserve water, especially if you are on a well.
 - Keep doors, windows and draperies closed to retain heat.
 - Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed. If doors remain closed, a fully loaded freezer can keep foods frozen for up to two days.
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- Never use a charcoal barbeque inside the home. If you use candles for light, keep in mind they can cause a fire. It's far better to use battery-operated flashlights or glow sticks for alternative lighting.
 - If you use a kerosene heater, gas lantern or stove inside the house, maintain ventilation to avoid a buildup of toxic fumes.
 - Stay far away from downed power lines.
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How to prepare for a windstorm

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- Anchor outdoor objects that can blow away before the storm starts.

- Do not drive or go outside in high winds. Avoid windows.

How to prepare for flooding

- Contact the local county geologist or county planning department to find out if your home is located in a flashflood-prone area or landslide-prone area.
 - Learn about your community's emergency plans, warning signals, evacuation routes and locations of emergency shelters.
 - Plan and practice a flood evacuation route with your family. Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to be the "family contact" in case your family is separated during a flood. Make sure everyone in your family knows the name, address and phone number of this contact person.
 - Post emergency phone numbers at every phone.
 - Keep an extra pair of eyeglasses, house keys and car keys on hand.
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- Inform local authorities about any special needs, such as elderly or bedridden people, or anyone with a disability.
 - Identify potential home hazards and know how to secure or protect them before the flood strikes. Be prepared to turn off electrical power when there is standing water, fallen power lines or before you evacuate. Turn off gas and water supplies before you evacuate. Secure structurally unstable building materials.
 - Buy a fire extinguisher and make sure family members know where it is and how to use it.
 - Buy and install sump pumps with back-up power.
 - Have a licensed electrician raise electric components (switches, sockets, circuit breakers and wiring) at least 12 inches above your home's projected flood elevation.
 - For drains, toilets and other sewer connections, install backflow valves or plugs to prevent floodwaters from entering.
 - Anchor fuel tanks which can contaminate your basement if torn free. An unanchored tank outside can be swept downstream and damage other houses.

If you are under a flood watch or warning

- Gather the emergency supplies you previously stocked in your home and stay tuned to local radio or television stations for updates.

- Turn off all utilities at the main power switch and close the main gas valve if evacuation appears necessary.
- Have your immunization records handy or be aware of your last tetanus shot in case you should receive a puncture wound or if a wound becomes contaminated during or after the flood.
- Fill bathtubs, sinks and plastic soda bottles with clean water. Sanitize the sinks and tubs first by using bleach. Rinse and fill with clean water.
- Bring outdoor possessions, such as lawn furniture, grills and trash cans inside or tie them down securely.

What to do in a tsunami (or monster waves)

- Heed natural and official warnings; if a tsunami hits, you will have little time to react.
- Expect many waves; abandon belongings, head for high ground and stay there.
- If possible, go to the upper floor or roof of a building. Failing that, climb a tree or climb onto something that floats.
- Don't count on the roads; they are likely to be flooded or at risk of sudden flooding.
- Expect the waves to leave debris.
- Expect company; if you live on high ground, others from lower ground may seek shelter with you.

How to prepare for an earthquake

- Identify safe spots and danger zones in each room.
 - Consider buying earthquake insurance.
 - Know how to shut off all utilities.
 - Ensure your house is firmly anchored to its foundation.
 - Anchor overhead lighting fixtures.
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- Store breakable items on low shelves or in cabinets that can fasten shut.
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- Place large or heavy objects on lower shelves.
 - Fasten shelves to walls. Brace high and top-heavy objects.
 - Repair defective electrical wiring, leaky gas and inflexible utility connections.
 - Securely fasten water heaters and gas appliances.

- Anchor wood-burning stoves to the floor. Secure the stove pipe to the flue exit and securely fasten stove pipe segments together.

What to do during an earthquake

- If indoors, take cover under sturdy furniture or against an inside wall and hold on: "Drop, Cover and Hold." Stay away from the kitchen!
- If outdoors, stay there. Move away from buildings, street lights and utility wires.
- If outdoors near tall buildings, step inside a doorway, drop down and cover your head and shoulders to protect yourself from falling glass and other debris.
- In a vehicle, stop as quickly as safety permits and stay in the vehicle. Avoid stopping near or under buildings, trees, overpasses or utility wires.

After an earthquake

- Check yourself and other for injuries.
- Prepare for aftershocks.
- Wear sturdy shoes to prevent injury.
- Use flashlights or battery-powered lanterns if the power is out.
- If you smell gas or hear a hissing sound, open a window, leave the building and shut off the main gas valve outside.
- If water pipes are damaged, shut off the water supply at the main valve.
- Check your home, including the chimney, for structural damage.
- Clean up any spilled medicines, bleaches and flammable liquids.
- Visually inspect utility lines and appliances for damage.
- Do not flush toilets until you know sewage lines are intact.
- Open cabinets cautiously. Beware of objects that can fall off shelves.
- Use the phone only to report a life-threatening emergency.
- Listen to the radio for the latest emergency information.
- Stay off the streets and avoid damaged areas unless you have been asked to help by the proper authority.

Although this list attempts to cover the basics, it is by no means comprehensive. For more information on emergency preparedness, log on to <http://www.islandcounty.net/gsa/des/preparedness.htm>, www.skagitcounty.net/dem or http://www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/Emergency_Management/.